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Congress Makes Clear Its Intent To Cut Administration's Request

By Paul Mann

Washington—Congress made clear last week the nation's \$1.7-trillion debt and mounting budget deficits will drive it toward halving the Administration's request for 5.9% real growth next year in defense spending.

Both Republican and Democrat members of the Senate Armed Services Committee predicted that when Congress takes final action next fall on the Fiscal 1986 budget, the defense increase will be 3-4% after inflation. That is halfway between the nearly 6% the Administration wants and the freeze at current levels widely advocated on Capitol Hill.

In the House, however, there were indications the cuts might go deeper than 3%. Anthony R. Battista of the House Armed Services Committee staff said a half-dozen members from both parties with whom he had spoken suggested a 3% increase was attainable, but was a maximum that might not be realized.

"One said [Defense Secretary] Caspar W. Weinberger ought to feel as if he's got a rabbit's foot in each pocket if he walks out of here with 3%," Battista said.

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Undue Acceleration

Warner said the Pentagon's \$3.7-billion request for SDI constituted a 160% increase in program growth. He cautioned that acceleration of that magnitude invited waste and inefficiency. Industry "is just incapable of absorbing such a substantial buildup," he said.

Weinberger disagreed. "We have a list of projects that is necessary to pursue," he said, "and no doubt of the ability of contract research work to be absorbed."

Battista agreed the Strategic Defense Initiative will be studied carefully. He said one element of the program, called SATKA (Surveillance, Acquisition, Target Kill Assessment), "which the select committee on Intelligence was concerned about last year, is now \$1.4 billion, and last year they were requesting about half of that."

The legislature's Intelligence Committee

tees have joint jurisdiction with Armed Services over some command, control and surveillance programs.

Battista, a member of the House Armed Services research and development subcommittee staff, said House concerns focused on the kinds of systems being built, the number of testbeds being put together and the fast pace of growth in the SATKA program. He also singled out a number of other programs for particular scrutiny, including:

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